

cows, 3 sub adults and 6 calves. All the calves were of the same age. Prater (1971) reported that the gaur gives birth all around the year but there could be a peak at some seasons. As many small calves were sighted during August and September, this may be one of the peak birth seasons for gaur in Mudumalai Wildlife Sanctuary.

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6. RANGE EXTENSION OF THE KASHMIR FLYING SQUIRREL (*HYLOPETES FIMBRIATUS* GRAY)

The Kashmir flying squirrel (*Hylopetes fimbriatus*), belongs to the Family Scuridae. It has a distributional range from north Punjab and Kashmir, eastwards to Simla in Himachal Pradesh (Corbett and Hill 1992). Ellerman (1961) and Prater (1980) describe two races of the Kashmir flying squirrel from the western Himalayas; *H.f. fimbriatus* and *H.f. baberi*. The race *H.f. baberi* is considered a different species by Corbett and Hill (1992).

The general colour of the dorsal surface of the body was brownish-black with whitish underparts. The squirrel had distinct brown pinnae and a thick, hairy brownish black tail. Each hind and forelimb had four functional toes almost of same size, the fifth toe being small. Each toe had distinct claws. The soles were bare with a spongy pad below each toe. The measurements of the body parts taken are given in Table 1.

On the basis of the above characters the species was identified as the Kashmir flying squirrel (*Hylopetes fimbriatus*). The species is endemic to the western Himalayas (Prater 1980). Thus the occurrence of the Kashmir flying squirrel in Ranikhet extends the range of the species by about 300 km.

TABLE 1
EXTERNAL MEASUREMENTS OF *HYLOPETES*
FIMBRIATUS FOUND AT BALMORAL
(RANIKHET)

Sex	Head & Body (cm)	Ear (cm)	Tail (cm)	Hind-Foot (cm)	Fore-Foot (cm)
Male	26.9	3.4	29.0	8.5	6.1

A dead specimen of an adult male Kashmir flying squirrel was recovered from Balmoral site in Ranikhet (29° 29' N, 79° 26' E), Kumaon, Uttar Pradesh, on 8th May, 1995. The general morphological characters and the measurements of certain body parts were noted down.

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7. CATTLE EGRET *BUBULCUS IBIS* FEEDING ON BABY RATS

The cattle egret *Bubulcus ibis* has been associated with grazing cattle, seizing insects disturbed by their movements (Ali 1979). The role of this bird in the biological control of white grubs during ploughing operations has been documented by Parasharya *et al.*, (1994). The egret is known to follow ploughs and tractors (Kushlan 1978) with restricted foraging close to the heronry during the breeding season. In addition to many species of insects, the egret eats frogs, lizards, etc. (Ali 1979).

In the morning of 17th November, 1995, one of the fields of the Millet Research Station, Jamnagar was being ploughed. The crop raised in this field in the previous *kharif* season was bajra (*Pennisetum glaucum* (L)). We noticed cattle egret (21), black drongo *Dicrurus adsimilis* (6), bank myna *Acridotheres ginginianus* (2), common myna *A. tristis* (2), rosy pastor *Sturnus roseus* (2) and house crow *Corvus splendens* (3) following the tractor. All of them were busy eating the insects exposed by the tractor. A good number of egrets (5 to 10) always followed the tractor very closely. Once we observed that 5 of the egrets suddenly stopped following the tractor and stood gazing at one place. After a few seconds, one of the egrets stepped forward and picked up something black in colour, about 3 cm long, moved about a metre away and swallowed it. A few seconds later, another egret did the same. As we approached, the egrets moved away a few metres. We saw a litter of golden coloured rats attached to the postero-ventral part of the abdomen of an adult rat, probably it was suckling. When the adult rat ran away from us, the

infant got detached from its mother. The egret came and picked up the infant and swallowed it. Approximately 10 min later, at another place in the same field, an egret was observed feeding on a young rat caught from the furrow. This time three house crows tried unsuccessfully to pirate it. The hesitation by the egrets in catching the baby rats (the first three feeding attempts described) must have been due to the infants being attached to their mother.

As the fields are ploughed by tractor, the exposed rats with young ones hardly get time to escape, and fall prey to the egrets. Crows also follow the plough and being quite bold can catch rats. It is believed that owls and other birds of prey are the main avian predators of rats in agricultural fields. But our observation suggests that during ploughing the egret could be the major predator of rats, thus playing an important role in pest control.

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